

CALIFORNIA

OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

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WHAT DO TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS DO?

TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS convert, as accurately as possible, the spoken or written words and expressions of one language into those of another.

Translators deal with written text. Interpreters work with speech. They listen to speakers and interpret what they say. Sight Translators convert written words into spoken words and transcribers convert spoken words into written words. Translators, Interpreters, Sight Translators, and Transcribers convert the source language into the target language. Translators and Interpreters must have native or near-native fluency in the languages with which they deal and must be quite knowledgeable of the subject matter involved. In addition, they should have excellent research and public speaking skills.

Most of the work of the Translator falls into five main categories: economic and financial, legal, literary, medical, and scientific and technical.

Economic and financial translations are usually done at the request of business and government agencies and require experience or training in those fields.

Legal Translators translate legal documents such as statutes, foreign court orders, treaties, and foreign language documents submitted as evidence in federal, State, and local courts. Because of the importance of accuracy for such work, Legal Translators must be able to correctly translate even ambiguous or unclear statements.

Literary translation is usually done on a commission basis for publishing houses and requires a flair for re-creating the author's creative devices. Literary Translators may work closely with authors or editors for accuracy.

In addition to providing translation for documents in hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices, Medical Translators may translate medical testimony in courts.

Translators who specialize in scientific and technical documents need an excellent knowledge of fields such as aerospace, auto manufacturing, biotechnology, computers, engineering, marine sciences, mathematics, and patents. Interpreters usually work either as guides and escorts or in conference or court settings. They may interpret consecutively, waiting for the speaker to pause to translate what has been said, or simultaneously, in which case they translate continuously while the speaker is talking. The latter is more difficult, but it is required of Court and International Conference Interpreters. It requires such an intuitive knowledge of the source language and the subject matter that the Interpreter must be able to anticipate what the speaker will say as well as have the ability to talk and

listen at the same time. Court Interpreters must interpret simultaneously except when the non-English speaking person is on the stand testifying, in which case they interpret consecutively.

The job of Sign Language Interpreters is very similar to the job of Foreign Language Interpreters. In sign language interpreting, however, the hands rather than a foreign language are used to communicate. Sign Language Interpreters convert a speaker's words into American Sign Language (ASL), using their hands, fingers, and facial expressions. They also repeat the deaf person's signed response to the speaker.

The occupation of braille transcriber, which is sometimes referred to by its lay title of Braille Translator, shares many characteristics with the occupation of Foreign Language Translators.

Braille is a writing system using a series of raised dots to be read with the fingers by people who are blind or whose eyesight is not sufficient for reading printed material.

Braille Translators operate a Brailewriter, and/or Braille word processor, computer, electronic Braille printer, and other related equipment to prepare texts in Braille or raised line format. They transcribe a wide variety of documents into braille.

Translators and Interpreters perform the following tasks:

- Translate approximate or exact message of speaker into specified language, orally or by using hand signs for hearing impaired.
- Translate responses from second language to first.
- Read written material, such as legal documents, scientific works, or news reports and rewrite material into specified language, according to established rules of grammar.
- Listen to statements of speaker to ascertain meaning and to remember what is said, using electronic audio system.
- Receive information on subject to be discussed prior to interpreting session.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Translators and Interpreters include:

- Active Listening – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- Speaking – Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- Service Orientation – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- Foreign Language – Knowledge of the structure and content of a foreign (non-English) language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition and grammar, and pronunciation.
- English Language – Knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
- Communications and Media – Knowledge of media production, communication, and dissemination techniques and methods. This includes alternative ways to inform and entertain via written, oral, and visual media.
- Oral Comprehension – The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- Oral Expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
- Written Comprehension – The ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Speech Recognition – The ability to identify and understand the speech of another person.
- Written Expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
- Speech Clarity – The ability to speak clearly so others can understand you.

- Memorization – The ability to remember information such as words, numbers, pictures, and procedures.
- Selective Attention – The ability to concentrate on a task over a period of time without being distracted.
- Auditory Attention – The ability to focus on a single source of sound in the presence of other distracting sounds.

WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

The work environment for Translators and Interpreters can be quite varied. Most work is done indoors, but interpreting can involve traveling to remote and possibly uncomfortable or dangerous places. Translators spend most of their time in front of a computer with periodic referencing of electronic and paper dictionaries, glossaries, and terminology databases. Interpreters initiate an assignment with subject research before going to client meetings for the interpreting session.

Many Translators and Interpreters work as an independent contractor, either directly for their clients or through language service agencies. Translators and Interpreters working for private corporations commonly devote time to other duties such as technical writing and training. Sign language Interpreters work in whatever setting a deaf person needs to communicate. Interpreters sometimes get the opportunity to travel when acting as escorts or guides and at conferences.

Union Membership

Some Translators and Interpreters are members of the Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America.

WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the Employment Development Department (EDD) Labor Market Information Division (LMID):

Interpreters and Translators

Estimated number of workers in 2002:	3,000
Estimated number of workers in 2012:	3,600
Projected Growth 2002-2012:	20.0%
Est. openings due to separations by 2012:	400

These figures do not include self-employment.

This occupation will grow at an average pace compared with all occupations in California. Some 1,000 jobs will become available during this forecast period, including those openings due to turnover and job separations.

In California, the majority of translation and interpreting jobs require fluency in Chinese, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese.

Trends

Most Translators use specialized computer software in the course of their work. "Machine translation" is not yet a substitute for human translation due to its grammatical inaccuracy and error rate. However, some Translators use computer programs as a labor-saving device to do a rough draft translation that can be edited later. Computer-aided translation software memory tools allow Translators to increase the word volume of daily translations to increase income as most free-lance Translators are paid by the number of words, sentences or pages.

WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

California Earnings

The following information is from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID:

Interpreters and Translators 2005 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$14.01	to	\$21.56
Average hourly wage	\$18.52		
Average annual wage	\$38,517		

These figures do not include self-employment.

Translators who work for the State of California start at \$2,850 a month; the top pay is \$3,465

monthly. Individuals who are classified as language specialists for the Federal Government begin at the GS-5 level (with BA degree) which starts at \$24,677 a year or the GS-9 level (with MA degree) which starts at \$37,390 a year and can advance to the GS-10 level which caps at \$53,532 a year. For most major metropolitan areas in the United States, the Federal Government gives a "Locality Pay" increase up to \$14,000 a year to cover the cost of living differences.

Salaries vary widely in the private sector by industry and language. Highly skilled conference Interpreters can make \$500-\$900 plus expenses. Guide, or escort Interpreters, for example, may earn \$50 to \$140 per half day and from \$75 to \$210 per full day depending on the required time, complexity and technical nature of the interpreting.

The California court system employs Interpreters on a regular basis. The Los Angeles Superior Court, for example, pays certified or registered Interpreters \$147 per half day and \$265 for a full day's work, while non-certified or non-registered Interpreters are paid \$92 per half day and \$175 for a full day. Interpreters hired through agencies and handling depositions make approximately \$125 to \$300 per half day and from \$200 to \$400 for a full day.

Sign Language Interpreters who work through an agency earn between \$35.00 and \$60.00 an hour. Sign Language Interpreters who work as independent contractors can earn anywhere from \$40 to \$80 per hour.

Salaries of independent contract Translators are determined by the number of words, lines, or pages they need to translate. The U.S. State Department, for example, pays an average of 11 to 23 cents per word depending on the language being translated.

Sometimes earnings are lower in the private sector. However, the United Nations and other international agencies pay higher rates than the U.S. Government.

Hours

Although some civil service Translators and Interpreters work a regular 40-hour week, freelancers can't expect to work full time. Translators, Interpreters and Sign Language Interpreters often have to work long and unusual hours. The demand for their service may be sporadic.

Benefits

There is a wide variation in the benefits available to Translators and Interpreters as well as a wide variability in their value, but those working in-house for government agencies and corporations are eligible for good benefit packages which include sick and vacation leave, medical insurance, and retirement benefits.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

Education and Training

Translators and Interpreters need to be skilled in one or more languages other than their own, plus they should have a thorough knowledge of the culture and customs of the countries where these languages are spoken. California Court Interpreters must be certified. Cooperative Personnel Services in Sacramento is the only agency in California that administers testing programs for court Interpreters. A college degree is generally not required for independent contract work, but it provides the facility of expression and broad knowledge necessary for this work. Travel abroad is highly recommended for becoming familiar with the cultural environment of other languages. A bachelor of arts in the main language, passing a test and being skilled in three of the six official United Nations languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and some experience are the minimum requirements needed to work for the United Nations.

Few schools in the United States provide degree programs in translating and interpreting. The Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, offers the only master's degree programs in both Asian and European

languages (Chinese, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish) combining translation and interpretation in the American Hemisphere. Three MA's are offered in translation, translation and interpretation and conference interpretation with one-year (30 semester units) or two-year (60 semester units) programs. Admission requirements include a BA degree, passing a set of language tests, 3.0/4.0 undergraduate GPA, 600 written TOEFL (non-native English speakers), and at least six months in a foreign country.

Many community and four-year colleges offer certificate programs and/or AA degrees in American Sign Language Interpretation.

For foreign language interpretation and translation programs, access the following link:
www.cpec.ca.gov/CollegeGuide/CollegeGuide.asp.

Licensing and Certification

Strictly speaking, no certification or licensing is required of Translators and Interpreters not involved in legal work. However, licenses and certificates and other educational accomplishments increase the salability of one's services.

State certification for Court Interpreter, Administrative Hearing Interpreter, and Medical Interpreter is issued to those who pass the tests and pay fees to Cooperative Personal Services in Sacramento. The Court Interpreter exam is given once a month in Los Angeles and tests ability in consecutive interpretation, sight translation, and simultaneous interpretation. The test costs range from \$250 to \$300.

An \$85 annual fee, 30 hours of continuing education and 40 law-related Interpreter assignments are required every two years.

The University of California Los Angeles Extension offers a certificate program in interpretation and translation, Spanish/English, English/Spanish, Chinese/English, English/Chinese, Korean/English and English/Korean. The program prepares students for the exams required by the courts and administrative agencies at the county, State and federal levels.

California State University, Los Angeles Division of Extended Education offers a certificate program in legal translation and interpretation. The program provides training for county, State, and federal examinations required for employment as certified Interpreters and Translators.

The Northern California Translators Association (NCTA) and Southern California Area Translators and Interpreters Association (SCATIA), which are the Northern and Southern California chapters of the American Translators Association (ATA); provide translation, interpretation, and other language-related services. NCTA and SCATIA (first and second largest ATA chapters) sponsor the ATA accreditation exams held in July for the Southern California area (SCATIA) and October for the Northern California area (NCTA).

The Recruiting Department of Browne Global Solutions Interpretation Services in the Washington, DC area gives an oral exam for registration as Interpreters. Browne Global Solutions in New York City gives a written test to technical Translators. Interpreters are divided into three types: consecutive, technical consecutive, and conference/simultaneous.

Although Sign Language Interpreters don't need to be certified to obtain a job, employers often show preference to certified applicants

Continuing Education

Continuing education is not required for a Translator. Although, law-related Interpreters are required to accomplish 30 hours of continuing education every two years in order to be State-licensed. This training is available at many colleges and translation associations.

HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Most Translators and Interpreters are employed by translation and interpretation language service agencies. Those seeking work in county, State, federal, or local government, or within the court systems should look in the Government Pages of

the white pages of the phone book. The United Nations, international organizations, and companies with global interests employ Translators and Interpreters.

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- Translators and Interpreters
- Publishers-Book
- Exporters
- Importers

The following Internet resources can be helpful to the job search process:

America's Career InfoNet
www.acinet.org

America's Job Bank
www.ajb.dni.us

CalJOBSSM
www.caljobs.ca.gov

Job Search and Resume Writing
www.worksmart.ca.gov/success_tips_menu.html

Local Job Service Offices
www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm

Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Online
<http://online.onetcenter.org>

One-Stop Career Centers List
www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm

For statewide and local projections, wages, employers by county, and other occupational information go to www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov and select *Find an Occupation Profile*.

Freelance Translators and Interpreters and Employers Marketplace Web Site
www.proz.com

Full-time Jobs Web Sites
www.bilingualsearch.com

WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?

Speed of advancement for Translators and Interpreters is determined by their skill. Advancement may consist of more difficult assignments and higher pay. Translators may advance to translation editor positions or reviewers who check the work of other Translators. Some go on to own translation agencies. Interpreters and Sign Language Interpreters may become chief Interpreters, staff directors, or managers.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

American Translators Association (ATA)
225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-6100
www.atanet.org

Northern California Translators Association (NCTA)
P.O. Box 14015
Berkeley, CA 94712-5015
(510) 845-8712
www.ncta.org

Southern California Area Translators and Interpreters Association (SCATIA)
P.O. Box 570678
Tarzana, CA 91357
(818) 340-9177
www.scatia.org

CPS Human Resource Services
241 Lathrop Way
Sacramento, CA 95815
(916) 263-3600
www.cps.ca.gov

Office of the United Nations Resources Management
1 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
(212) 963-1234, Ext. 2145

Monterey Institute of International Studies
Career and Enrollment Management
Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation
460 Pierce Street
Monterey, CA 93940
(831) 647-3531
www.miiis.edu

California Court Interpreters Association
5620 Paseo del Norte #127-441
Carlsbad, CA 92008
(760) 603-1892
www.ccia.org

The California Healthcare Interpreting Association
One Capitol Mall, Suite 320
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 669-5305
www.chia.ws

American Literary Translators Association
The University of Texas at Dallas
P.O. Box 830688, Mail Station J051
Richardson, TX 75083-0688
(972) 883-2093
www.literarytranslators.org

Browne Global Solutions Interpretation Services
Recruiting Department
1101 14th Street, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20005
(888) 241-9149
www.bgsinterpretation.com

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
333 Commerce Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 838-0030
www.rid.org

Translators and Interpreters Guild
Local 32100 of The Newspaper Guild-CWA
962 Wayne Avenue, #500
Silver Spring, MD 20910
(800) 992-0367
www.ttig.org

RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

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Technical Writers	No. 138
Librarians	No. 154
Guides	No. 549

OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

SOC (*Standard Occupational Classification*)
Interpreters and Translators 27-3091

O*NET (*Occupational Information Network*)
Interpreters and Translators 27-3091.00

OES (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)
Other Professionals, Paraprofessional,
Technical, NEC 39999